

APPENDIX H

OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

Review and Update

The Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) is an integral part of New Hampshire's administration of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program. The OPSP satisfies state and federal needs for public notification and knowledge about the LWCF program. It assures the distribution of LWCF assistance in a nondiscriminatory manner and ensures a fair and equitable evaluation of all applications. The OPSP provides a measurable link, through published selection criteria, between the priorities established in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and the grants for land acquisition and facility development projects.

The OPSP ranking criteria will continue to reflect those issues identified in the latest edition of the state's SCORP. Certain OPSP criteria may be modified or added, depending upon LWCF administrative and planning staff, and OPSP Advisory Panel discussions. Modifications and additions must be based on the SCORP and approved by the National Park Service.

New Hampshire's use of the OPSP began in 1981, coincidental with the sharp decline in federal funding for the LWCF program. The OPSP has evolved through several grant rounds, and it continues to serve the purpose of helping to select the best projects with the most benefits. This evolution has, for instance, included modifications to the selection criteria to more fairly reflect need based on population growth (e.g. communities with higher population growth rates are awarded relatively more selection criteria points than those communities with lower growth rates). Also, more emphasis has been placed on a community's ability to pay (e.g. the less able a community is to pay for the project, the more points the applicant receives). The qualities of the particular project and the numbers of potential recreationists that may benefit from the completed project have also become relatively more important as the OPSP has evolved. Protection of certain outstanding natural areas has likewise grown in importance.

New Hampshire's OPSP began at a time when there were perennial excesses in LWCF funds available to New Hampshire. Partially due to this fact, the State in 1981 did not have an outreach program to reach all potential sponsors. There was no public advisory committee organized to assist in setting priorities. These shortcomings tended to reduce the apparent need for LWCF assistance, although over time experience has indicated that the need has always been there. The need was simply not being found or defined.

With the decade of the 80's came drastic reductions in federal LWCF appropriations. Like most (if not all) other states, New Hampshire began finding itself far from able to meet the demands for LWCF assistance for both state and local projects. By 1987, LWCF grant assistance was able to fund only 4 out of 22 local applications. Ten years earlier, no

project proposal had been turned down due to lack of LWCF funds.

OPSP Advisory Panel

The Open Project Selection Process Advisory Panel was formed in 1981. Membership on the Panel has varied from year to year but has always maintained a core of potential LWCF users and interest groups. Members come from towns, cities, school districts, and State agencies. Other members represent the conservation community and the recreation community. Members represent minority populations, the elderly, and the handicapped. The State Liaison Officer (SLO) for LWCF, the Commissioner of the Department of Resources and Economic Development, appoints the approximately 18-member Advisory Panel as needed and as vacancies occur.

The OPSP Advisory Panel meets approximately twice a year at the request of the SLO or his staff. Generally, one meeting is called to review and recommend possible program rules and changes to the selection criteria based on the SCORP. A second yearly meeting takes place at the conclusion of grant project application evaluations. At this meeting the OPSP Advisory Panel is requested to review the staff evaluations and advise the staff regarding the ranking process. After both meetings, the advice and recommendations of the OPSP Advisory Panel are forwarded to the SLO for his consideration and application to the National Park Service.

Project Selection Criteria

The project selection criteria are designed to select the best of the project applications from each grant round. For most criteria, a range of points is allowed (for example 0-4, 1-3, 0-7). The final number of points awarded to each project proposal is simply the summation of all the points given to each criterion. The exact numbers of points, and the selection criteria themselves, may vary from year to year, however, an eye is always kept on the overall program goal of fairly and equitably distributing the LWCF assistance. Recommendations for revisions may originate from the SCORP, from DRED or OEP staff, or from the OPSP Advisory Panel. All proposed revisions to the OPSP must be reviewed, evaluated, and approved by the National Park Service Regional Director.